

Sūrah Al-A'la (The Most Exalted)

This Sūrah is Makkī, and it has 19 verses

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

Verses 1 - 19

سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى ﴿١﴾ الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى ﴿٢﴾ وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ
فَهَدَى ﴿٣﴾ وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى ﴿٤﴾ فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَى ﴿٥﴾
سُنْقَرُهُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى ﴿٦﴾ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ ۖ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا
يَخْفَى ﴿٧﴾ وَنُيْسِرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى ﴿٨﴾ فَذَكَرْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَى ﴿٩﴾
سَيَذَكَّرُ مَنْ يَخْشَى ﴿١٠﴾ وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَى ﴿١١﴾ الَّذِي يَصْلَى
النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى ﴿١٢﴾ ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَى ﴿١٣﴾ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ
تَزَكَّى ﴿١٤﴾ وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى ﴿١٥﴾ بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا
﴿١٦﴾ وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى ﴿١٧﴾ إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى
﴿١٨﴾ صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى ﴿١٩﴾

Pronounce the purity of the name of your Most Exalted Lord, [1] who created (everything), then made (it) well, [2] and who determined a measure (for everything), then guided (it), [3] and who brought forth pasturage, [4] then turned it into blackening stubble. [5] We will make you recite, then you will not forget [6] except that which Allah wills. Indeed He knows what is manifest and what is hidden. [7] And We will facilitate for you (to reach)

the easiest way. [8] So, extend advice (to people) if advice is useful. [9] The one who fears (Allah) will take to the advice, [10] and it will be avoided by the most wretched [11] who will enter the Biggest Fire, [12] then he will neither die therein, nor live (a life worth mentioning). [13] Success is surely achieved by him who purifies himself, [14] and pronounces the name of his Lord, then offers prayer. [15] But you prefer the worldly life, [16] while the Hereafter is much better and much more durable. [17] Indeed this is (written) in the earlier divine scripts, [18] the scripts of Ibrahim and Musa. [19]

Commentary

Ruling [1]

Scholars have ruled that when anyone recites the verse: سُبِّحَ اسْمُ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى (Pronounce the purity of the name of your most exalted Lord...87:1) it is commendable to say:

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى

'I pronounce the purity of my most exalted Lord.'

This was the practice of all the noble Companions, like Sayyidna 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbaā, Ibn 'Umar, Ibn Zubair, Abū Mūsā and 'Abdullāh Ibn Mas'ūd رضي الله عنهم اجمعين. Whenever they started reciting the Sūrah, they would recite:

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى

'I pronounce the purity of my most exalted Lord.' [Qurṭubī].

It should be noted that the desirability of reciting this is outside of the prayer.

Ruling [2]

Sayyidnā 'Uqbah Ibn 'Āmir Al-Juhānī رضي الله عنه narrates that when the Sūrah Al-A'la was revealed, the Holy Prophet ﷺ instructed:

اجعلوها في سجودكم

'Say this (Subḥāna Rabbiyal-A'la) in your *sujūd* [prostrations]'

سُبِّحَ اسْمُ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى (Pronounce the purity of the name of your Most exalted Lord.) The word *tasbiḥ* means 'to pronounce the purity' and سُبِّحَ اسْمُ رَبِّكَ signifies to 'honour the name of your Lord'. When the name of Allah is pronounced, it should be done with utmost humility and respect.

His name should be kept pure and free from anything that is unbecoming to His sublime status. Allah should be called by the names He Himself has stated or taught the Holy Prophet ﷺ. It is not permitted to call Him by any other name.

Ruling [3]

Besides, it is also included in the above imperative that there are some names exclusively meant for Allah; calling human beings or any other creation by those specific names is contrary to declaring the purity of Allah. Therefore, it is not permissible. [Qurṭubī]. Nowadays, people are not particular about names like 'Abdur Raḥmān', 'Abdur-Razzāq', 'Abdul Ghaffār' and 'Abdul Quddūs'. They call the persons bearing these names 'Raḥmān', 'Razzāq', 'Ghaffār', 'Quddus' and so on, for short. People have got into the habit of shortening such names without realising that the speakers as well as the listeners are committing a sin. People commit this joyless sin day and night without any reason.

Some commentators interpret the word '*ism*' does not mean 'name' in this verse. Instead, they say, it is referring to the *Dhāt* or the 'Being' of Allah. According to the Arabic expressions, this interpretation is not unlikely, and the Qur'an has used the word '*ism*' in that sense also. The Ḥadīth that instructs us to recite the *tasbīḥ* in *sajdah* [prostration] is not "I pronounce the purity of the name of my most exalted Lord, but "I pronounce the purity of my most exalted Lord". This indicates that in this context '*ism*' is not used in the sense of 'name' but it refers to the Being of Allah Himself. [Qurṭubī]

Subtle and Profound Wisdom in the Creation of the Universe

الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى (who created [everything], then made [it] well, and who determined a measure [for everything], then guided [it]...87:2,3). All these are the attributes of the 'Most Exalted Lord'. The first attribute is *khalāqa* which does not simply mean 'to make' or 'manufacture'. It has a deeper significance: 'to bring out something from pure non-existence into the realm of existence without the help of any pre-existing matter'. (This is the correct meaning of 'creation'. If something is made with the help of some pre-existing matter, it cannot be called 'creation' in its original sense.) This is not within the power of anyone else. Only the perfect power of Allah can bring things into existence, whenever He wills, without the help of any pre-existing matter.

The second attribute, which is connected with *takhliq* (creation), is *sawwā*. This word is derived from *taswiyah*, and it literally means 'to make well or equal'. The verse signifies that Allah made the constitution of everything symmetrical or made it congruously consistent in its several parts, the body structure, shape and size, limbs and organs. Man and every other animal is adapted to the requirements of wisdom. The hands and legs, the tips of the fingers and toes have joints with different types of springy connective tissues that make it possible to bend and fold in different ways. If we look at another limb or organ of human body, its symmetry and balance baffles our imagination and is sufficient for us to believe in the consummate wisdom and power of the Creator of the universe.

The third attribute is *qaddara* which is derived from *taqdīr* and it means 'to determine; to measure; to balance; to design symmetrically; to decree/ decide'. The word is used in the last sense here. The verse purports to say that things in the world have not been created without purpose. Everything has been created for a specific purpose, and has been endowed with natural capacities to fit its function. If we look carefully, the principle does not apply only to specific species. Every member of the universe has been assigned a specific function to perform. We witness the manifestation of the assignments in the sky, the stars, lightning, rain, humans, animals, vegetation and minerals.

Maulānā Rūmī رحمہ اللہ تعالیٰ **says:**

خاک و باد و آب و آتش بندہ اند.....ہامن و تومردہ باحق زندہ اند

'The earth, the wind, the water and the fire__all of them are slaves of Allah.

According to me and you, they are senseless, but according to Allah, all of them are alive and sensible.

Allah has especially geared man and every species of animals to do particular works and they perform them according to their natural inclination, and their predisposition pivots around their respective tasks.

ہر یکے را بہر کارے ساختند.....میل اور اور دلش انداختند

Allah has created everything for a particular purpose
And has filled its heart with inclination towards it.

The fourth attribute of Allah is *fa-hadā* 'then guided it'. In other words, The Creator of the universe did not create things and left them to their own mercy to perform their particular function as they like, but they are shown the way in which they should be performed. As a matter of fact, He guided the entire creation by equipping each member of it with suitable nature to function for which it was created, whether the member is the sky or celestial creation, or it is the earth or the earthly creation. They all possess a special type of sense, though it is of a lower than that of man. The Qur'an says:

رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ، ثُمَّ هَدَى

'Our Lord is He Who gave to each thing its form and nature, then guided it aright . [20:50]'

As a result, since the inception of their creation, the skies, the earth, the stars and planets, mountains and oceans are all performing their functions accurately, without any failure or deviation. Humans and animals, in particular, whose intellect and sensibility can be observed easily, have been invested with capabilities of fulfilling their minute needs and repelling harmful things in a way that baffles the one who thinks about it. Since man possesses sense and intelligence of a higher degree, his capabilities may not be so much surprising, but let us look into wild animals, ferocious animals or beasts of prey, birds and insects. Each and everyone of them is able to obtain its necessities of life. They are able to find their habitats. They have not acquired the skills of fulfilling their individual and communal needs through a teacher that may educate or train them, nor did they need any school or college to acquire this knowledge and skill. Their education and training comes directly from the Creator of the universe. It is this divine guidance that has been referred to in the Holy Qur'an by saying,

رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ، ثُمَّ هَدَى

'Our Lord is He Who gave to each thing its form and nature, then guided it aright . [20:50]'

and in this Sūrah thus:

وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى

'and who determined a measure (for everything), then guided (it), [3]'

The Knowledge of Science is a Divine Gift to Man

Allah has equipped man with the higher order of intelligence and sense. The entire universe is made subservient to him,___the earth, mountains and oceans and everything created therein are made to serve man and created for his benefit. However, full advantage of them is not possible unless man acquires knowledge and skill to put various things together and produce a new item. Nature has provided man with intelligence and understanding to excavate mountains and dive into the oceans to obtain minerals and marine objects. He composes certain items like wood, iron, steel, copper, brass and so on and makes new items of his need. This knowledge and technology is not dependent on scientific research and college or university education. Even illiterate people have been doing this since the inception of human existence . This is intrinsic science that Allah has endowed upon man as a natural gift. Later, man developed the capability of doing technical and scientific research. He thus made progress in various fields of science and technology. The capability to do this is also a Divine gift.

Obviously, science and technology does not create anything, but it merely shows the way to use the created things. The initial knowledge about their use is taught by Allah, but there is a wide scope to make progress in it by the capabilities Allah has bestowed to man, the manifestation of which we are witnessing in this scientific age day by day, and what further range of these abilities and talents will manifest in future is unknown. All this is the interpretation of *hadā* '[He] guided (it), [3] In other words, Allah has placed in them potentials and capabilities to perform their natural functions. But alas! the scientists are getting more and more negligent, rather blind to these realities day by day.

وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَىٰ. فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَىٰ (and who brought forth pasturage, then turned it into a blackening stubble....87:4, 5)

The word *mar'ā* means 'pasturage'. This is the land that has grass growing on it, and that is used for animals to graze. The word *ghuthā'* refers to 'stubble, and scum borne upon the surface of a torrent'. The word *aḥwā* is derived from the root *ḥuwwah* which refers to 'a kind of black colour that comes upon a dense vegetation'. The verse purports to depict the Divine power and wisdom related to herbage and vegetation. He grows the green vegetation and then He gradually turns it into black

colour, and it loses its freshness. This directs man's attention also to his end. His body radiating with health, beauty, smartness and alertness is a Divine gift, but its tenure of life is limited. Eventually it will come to an end.

إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى. (We will make you recite, then you will not forget, except that which Allah wills. Indeed He knows what is manifest and what is hidden....87:6,7). In the preceding verses, Allah depicted the manifestation of His Omnipotence and [profound] wisdom. Thereafter, a few guidelines are given to the Holy Prophet ﷺ regarding his prophetic obligation. Before putting forth the guidelines, he is given the cheerful news of making his task easier. When the Qur'ān was revealed initially, and as Jibra'il عليه السلام began to recite, the Holy Prophet ﷺ made haste to repeat, lest any word or sentence should be lost. He was, therefore, told not to make haste with it, and to wait until the angel had delivered the whole message, and then to repeat the words of the revelation, being assured that it was a Divine arrangement, and that nothing would be lost. On this occasion, he is still more plainly told: 'then you will not forget, except that which Allah wills.'

While Allah made the Holy Prophet ﷺ remember all of the Qur'ān, there were certain verses which Allah made him forget, because they had been abrogated. This was done by Allah's command, and is not done without reason. There are several ways in which this is done. One way of doing this is that a second clear injunction is revealed contrary to the first injunction. Another way of abrogating a particular verse is to obliterate a verse from the memory of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the memory of all other Muslims, as stated in:

مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا

'Whenever We abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten.
[2:106]'

Some scholars interpret the exceptive sentence 'except that which Allah wills' differently. They say that for some reason Allah blots out temporarily a verse from Holy Prophet's ﷺ memory, but he may remember it again, in support of which the following narrative may be adduced: One day the Holy Prophet ﷺ recited a Sūrah, but omitted one of the verses. Sayyidnā Ubayy Ibn Ka'b رضي الله عنه, one of the Prophet's scribes,

was present. He thought it might have been abrogated. On inquiry, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said that it was not abrogated, but that it was omitted by mistake. [Qurtubī]. In this interpretation, it may be summarised that forgetting a verse temporarily, and then remembering it again, does not go against the promise made in this verse. [In fact, it is an exception from this promise.] Allah knows best!

وَنُيَسِّرْكَ لِلْيُسْرَى (And We will facilitate for you [to reach] the easiest way....87:8). The phrase 'the easiest way' refers to the sacred laws of Islam. Apparently, according to the demand of the context, it should have been stated 'We will make the Shari'ah easy for you'. But the Qur'an chose, instead, to state 'And We will facilitate for you (to reach) the easiest way. [8]'. The reason for that, probably, is to indicate that Allah will predispose him to the sacred laws, so that they will become part of his nature, and he will become an embodiment of Shari'ah.

فَذَكِّرْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَى (So, extend advice [to people] if advice is useful....87:9) The preceding verses described the facilities created by Allah for the Holy Prophet ﷺ in performing his Prophetic obligation. This verse commands him to perform his obligation. The verse contains the conditional particle 'in' (if) that apparently makes the sentence a conditional statement. But, in fact, the command is not intended to be made conditional. It is rather an emphatic statement. This is similar to the grammatical phenomenon in many languages. The particle 'if' is sometimes used when something is always true. It is used for introducing a situation that always has the same meaning, result or effect. For example: "If you are a 'man' [obviously he is a man], then you will have to do this work," In neither of such sentences, the particle 'if' is conditional, but rather emphatic. Likewise, the verse purports to say that preaching truth and righteousness is certainly useful. Therefore, the beneficial thing should never be abandoned at anytime.

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى (Success is surely achieved by him who purifies himself,...87:14) The word *tazakkā* is derived from *zakāh*, the primitive meaning of which is 'to purify'. The *zakāh* of wealth is so called because it purifies the rest of man's wealth for him. In this context, the word *tazakkā* is used in a general sense, which comprehends the purity of faith and character, and purity of wealth.

وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى (and pronounces the name of his Lord, then offers prayer....87:15). This covers all categories of prayer, obligatory as well as supererogatory. Some commentators say that it refers especially to 'Id prayers. This interpretation too can fall under the preceding category.

بَلْ تُوْثِرُوْنَ الْحَيٰوةَ الدُّنْيَا (But you prefer the worldly life,...87:16). Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn Mas'ūd رضي الله عنه says that people generally prefer the worldly blessings and comforts to the blessings and comforts of the Hereafter, because the former is visible and readily available, while the latter is invisible and unavailable readily. People unaware of reality preferred the visible to the invisible, which became the cause of eternal loss. In order to spare them the eternal loss, Allah, through His Messengers and Books, described to them the blessings and comforts of the Hereafter so clearly as if they can perceive them [through their sense organs]. It has been made plain to them that what they think is readily available and preferred, is actually fragile and will very soon perish. It is unwise to put one's heart into, or faith in, it and waste one's energy on it. Thus the Qur'ān says:

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى (while the Hereafter is much better and much more durable...87:17). The verse purports to warn those who prefer this life to the Hereafter that they should use their intelligence to find out what they have preferred and what they have abandoned. They are, first of all, made to realise that the highest degree of comfort and pleasure in this life is not free from the mixture of grief and hardship. In the second place, it is not permanent. We experience in our daily life that a king of today becomes a pauper tomorrow. A vigorous youth of today becomes old tomorrow. In the Hereafter, on the other hand, there will be freedom from both these defects. All its blessings and comforts will be 'much better' and they cannot be compared to the blessings and comforts of this life. Most importantly, it is *abqa* 'much more durable'.

Let us consider the following scenario: It is said to a person that there are two houses in front of him, one of which is a magnificent mansion, fully furnished and another an ordinary, substandard house, not properly furnished. He has the choice to take the mansion, but only for a month or two. Thereafter, he will have to vacate the mansion. Or he may take the underdeveloped house that he will own permanently. Which of the two houses a wise person will prefer? The answer is obvious that he will prefer the second option. On this analogy, one should prefer the blessings of the

Hereafter even if, for argument's sake, they are substandard, because they are permanent and eternal. But the fact is that they are not only permanent, but also much better and far more superior to the worldly comforts. In this situation only an unfortunate fool will prefer the blessings of this life to the bounties of the Hereafter.

إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى (Indeed this is [written] in the earlier divine scripts, the scripts of Ibrāhīm and Mūsā....87:18, 19) In other words, either all the themes of this Sūrah or its last theme, that the Hereafter is much better and much more durable than this life, was written in the earlier Divine scriptures. It is further explicated that this theme was written in the scriptures of Prophets Ibrāhīm and Mūsā عليه السلام. Probably, it refers to other scriptures that were given to Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام before Torah. It is also possible that it refers to Torah itself.

Themes of the Scripts of Prophet Ibrāhīm عليه السلام

Ājurri transmits a narration from Sayyidnā Abū Dharr Al-Ghifārī رضي الله عنه that he inquired from the Prophet ﷺ as to the contents of the scripts of Prophet Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and the Holy Prophet ﷺ replied that they contained educating parables . A story is told in it about a tyrant king where he is addressed and told: You haughty, arrogant and oppressive ruler! I did not give you kingdom so that you may amass wealth, but I had given you power so that you may let the supplication of the oppressed against the oppressor reach me, because my law does not reject the supplication of an oppressed, even though it may be uttered by an unbeliever.

Another parable addresses the general public thus: A wise person should divide his time into three parts. One part should be reserved for the worship of his Lord and supplication to Him. The second part should be reserved for self-assessment of his deeds, and reflection on the Omnipotence and creation of Allah. The third part should be allocated for acquisition of livelihood and fulfilling the natural needs. It further imparts that a wise person should keep himself abreast of the circumstances of his time, and keep himself busy in performing his intended work. He should take care of his tongue. He who takes speech as one of his works, his speech will be confined only to the things of real need .

Themes of the Scripts of Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام

Sayyidnā Abū Dharr Al-Ghifārī رضي الله عنه says that he then inquired from the Holy Prophet ﷺ as to the contents of the scripts of Prophet Mūsā عليه السلام and the Holy Prophet ﷺ replied that they contained lessons of wisdom. Some of them are as follows:

- I am surprised at the person who believes that he will certainly die, and yet he is lives happily.
- I am surprised at the person who believes in Divine destiny, and yet he is despondent and aggrieved.
- I am surprised at the person who experiences the vicissitudes of life and rise and fall of nations, and yet he is content with the world.
- I am surprised at the person who believes in the Reckoning of the Hereafter, and yet he abandons [good] deeds.

Sayyidnā Abū Dharr Al-Ghifārī رضي الله عنه says that he asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ whether anything from these scriptures was revealed to him, he replied in the affirmative and asked Sayyidnā Abū Dharr Ghifārī رضي الله عنه to recite verses 14-19 of this Sūrah. [Qurṭubī]

Alḥamdulillah
The Commentary on
Sūrah Al-A'la
Ends here